



## OP-EDS

### Plight of Iraqi refugees demands 'humanitarian surge'

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Imagine one day the life you once knew was gone. One family member has been murdered, another kidnapped, and your own safety is threatened daily.

These are the tragic circumstances of many Iraqi refugees who have fled their country or been displaced internally inside of Iraq, having left their homes due to the ongoing threat of sectarian violence.

Not nearly enough attention and resources have been devoted to the humanitarian crisis unfolding in the region. Iraqis are now one of the largest displaced populations in the world. According to the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, more than 1.5 million Iraqis have fled to neighboring countries such as Jordan and Syria and an additional 2.7 million have been internally displaced.

Iraqis remain stranded, jobless and deprived of essential services, with conditions worsening by the day. As resources are depleted and desperation sets in, this deepening humanitarian crisis threatens to further destabilize the entire region.

While Congress has taken significant steps to address the plight of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), greater attention and resources must be focused on the calamity.

We recently introduced the Iraqi Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement, and Security Act (H.R. 6496), comprehensive legislation that addresses this worsening crisis.

Our legislation does the following:

- Authorizes \$700 million for each of the fiscal years 2009, 2010 and 2011 for the relief of Iraqi refugees and Internally Displaced Persons.
- Increases direct, accountable, bilateral assistance, as appropriate under U.S. law, and funding for international organizations and non-governmental organizations working in the region.
- Authorizes \$500 million to increase humanitarian aid and infrastructure support for Jordan.
- Urges increased cooperation between the United States government and the international community to address this crisis.

While many in Congress have differing opinions on the war, we must set partisan politics aside and work together to find common solutions to this desperate situation. Our legislation takes a comprehensive approach, and we therefore urge our colleagues from both sides of the aisle to support this critical bill, which has been endorsed by more than 25 non-governmental organizations and religious groups.

The facts speak for themselves. With militia groups in Iraq providing substantial assistance to IDPs, and host countries failing to provide the needed resources to desperate Iraqis, this is a recipe for disaster.

Congress must provide a "humanitarian surge" — the future of the Middle East depends on it.

*Hastings chairs the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (U.S. Helsinki Commission), and is the special representative on Mediterranean Affairs for the group's Parliamentary Assembly. Dingell chairs the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.*

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